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ABSTRACT

This paper begins by outlining six functions of a teacher center that are seen as generally accepted and by remarking on certain realities, like the overworked teacher and dearth of funds, that are pertinent to establishing a teacher center. The majority of the text is devoted to an explanation of a large number of specific principles that should be employed in the design of a center. The following organizational/administrative design principles are listed and described: cost effectiveness; optimal use of existing facilities, materials, and talent; minimal organizational intervention in existing channels of communication, authority, and decision making; communication among staff; teacher control of administration, program design, and budget management "to the greatest possible extent"; the location of activities in individual classrooms and local schools; and the use of teachers to train other teachers. General principles of program design listed include a call for a competency base, self-assessment, classroom clinics, and communication across subject and grade levels among teachers. (LP/JA)

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DEVELOPING A TEACHER CENTER

by

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DEVELOPING A TEACHER CENTER

The teacher center is emerging as one of the more intriguing ideas in American education. Much of the interest in this concept resides in the fact that it has not yet been given clear definition. As a result, teacher centers are variously defined, each definition varying according to the political, economic, social or educational concerns of the individual speaker. Some educators see a teacher center as a basis for political action aimed at giving teachers more power, autonomy and decision making capabilities. Some define the teacher center as a "resource center" to which teachers can come for materials, assistance, workshop training, and "professional" conversation. Some see teacher centers as district-operated training institutes with elaborated organizations and training programs designed to bring about more effective implementation of curriculum content and methodologies mandated by district planning staff. Others define a teacher center as a "place" to which teachers can escape so as "to do their own thing," whether that may be reading, casual talk, or organization of ad hoc workshops for anyone who might drop in. Some educators see a teacher center as a means of implementing national or local policy, and some see the center as a mechanism for developing both individual teacher performance and a related sense of professionalism.

Whatever the basis for interest in the teacher center concept, and whatever the variations in functions of teacher center operations, there is some agreement (at least among those who have entered into public duscussion) about what a teacher center is. It is generally agreed that a teacher center is both a *place* to which teachers can come for conversation, work and assistance, and a *series of activities* carried on in the individual schools. As a "place" a teacher center provides a physical setting for professional activities; it also functions as a *symbol* for developing a sense of professional identity. Most writers agree that teachers badly need an expanded, and partially non-classroom image as a basis for a more elaborate and productive professional self definition.

Most discussion of the teacher center concept has focused upon the activities or programs which characterize a center. Some educators have said that a teacher center has primarily a structure of activity, carried on in schools and in the community, but not localized into a specific place. Others have said that the activities of a center flow from a central place. Whichever view is taken, the activities of the teacher center are a critical dimension of its definition and define its funcions.

PRIMARY FUNCTIONS

There seems to be general agreement that a teacher center has six primary functions:

1. As a Clearing House for Dissemination of Information, Material Resources and Talent

   In this function the teacher center serves to put teachers within a local area in touch with one another, whether they come from the same school or from different schools, and to make it possible for the teachers to share good ideas, promising practices, problems and materials. The center also brings information, talent and material resources from without the local area and makes these available to teachers through the activities and communication networks into which the center feeds. The clearing house function is the single most important characteristic of the teacher center for it serves:

   a) To disseminate new ideas and procedures;

   b) To put teachers into closer communication with one another, while enhancing their individual sense of professional orientation; and thereby,

c) To reduce the sense of anonymity, powerlessness and loneliness which characterizes so many teachers in schools today, and,

d) To optimize the use of local talent by making it accessible to teachers and others whom the center serves. The clearing house function presupposes development of a common language among those whom the center serves, since dissemination of new ideas and procedures is both dependent upon and contributory to the development of a common language. This function also presupposes the creation of an organized system of communication among those whom the center services. A common language has no value unless people have access to one another, and information can not be disseminated, nor talent utilized if people are not "in touch."

2. As a Vehicle for Teachers to Come Together to Work Cooperatively on Solutions of Common Problems

The teacher center makes it possible for teachers to meet for purposes of discussion or for purposes of methods review and/or development. Improvement of curriculum and improvement of educational practice is very much dependent upon teachers having, a) access to one anothers ideas and b) the assistance of colleagues in solving problems and creating new teaching materials. The teacher center is commonly defined as providing an organizational impetus and a physical setting for these cooperative efforts.

3. As A Vehicle for Teachers to Express PROFESSIONAL Identity Through Efforts *Focused on Problems of Professional Practice as Opposed to Problems of Teacher Welfare*.

In the past teacher associations have principally focused upon teacher salary raises and teacher benefits and have done very little to involve local teachers directly and consistently in the development of skills, concepts and orientations relating to day to day practice. It seems obvious that professionalization of teaching will be principally based upon the development in teachers of attitudes, commitments, language, concepts and self definitions focused on teaching practice and its effect upon children and, through children, the community at large. This will require shifting discussion and emphasis of teacher groups from teacher room gossip, on the one hand, and teacher welfare, on the other, to significant problems of practice. By helping teachers to make such a shift, the teacher center should contribute to the enhancement of professional identity.

4. As A Training Center for Both Pre-Service and In-Service Teachers

In this training function, the teacher center will contribute to furthering the professional skills and competencies of teachers already in service. By involving pre-service teachers in the activities of the center, in-service teachers can contribute substantially to raising the quality of pre-service training.

5. As A Vehicle for Teachers and Non-Teachers (e.g. Businessmen, Scientists, Skilled Craftsmen, and Others in the Community) to Come Together to Work Cooperatively on the Development of Educational Programs

Since the focus of teacher centers in on the improvement of teaching practice and curriculum and since the teacher center would inevitably organize workshops for these purposes, it becomes a relatively easy matter for participating teachers to

seek the consultative and advisory assistance of the members of the community. A teacher center provides a new organizational dimension for such efforts, thereby raising the possibility of overcoming existing stereotypes and images of school community relations.

6. As a Vehicle for Coordination of Teacher Development Activities with Parent Programs Designed to Facilitate Effective Learning and Social-Emotional Development in Children

An effective teacher center will design and implement programs which will bring teachers and parents on to complementary (if not collaborative) courses of action.

DESIGN PRINCIPLES

Some Basic Realities

The creation and development of teacher centers capable of effectively implementing the functions outlined above is critically dependent upon the extent to which the center design is responsive to a series of realities. One of the more obvious realities is fiscal. The costs of financing public education are rising every month and the ability of local and state agencies to meet these rising costs is decreasing. The result is that implementation of new efforts must compete with existing priorities and must also be cost effective. With fundings so critically limited, it becomes ever more important to make responsible decisions about the use of money and it is increasingly clear that a way must be found to make such decisions in terms of per pupil benefit for each dollar expended. This means that whatever the character of its program, a teacher center will only have fiscal life so long as those programs are measurable in terms of behavior output and its relation to dollar input.

The second reality is organizational. Teacher centers will be created and maintained to the extent to which they require minimal changes or elaboration of existing parts of school organization. It is well known that the social organization of a school is highly resistant to change, and when threatened, mobilizes actively to inhibit change efforts. Therefore, teacher centers must, at least in their formative stages, operate within existing organizational operations wherever possible. This does not mean that its operations might *lead* to changes in school organization. Such changes will, however, inevitably be the *result* of teacher center operations and *not* the cause.

A third, and perhaps the most important, reality, which will determine the success or failure of a teacher center, is the highly patterned sense of non-involvement, isolation and overwork common among American teachers. It has been discovered again and again that teachers do not willingly participate in staff development activities and they do not willingly involve themselves in discussions unless such discussions are directly focused on the activities in their own individual classrooms. For a teacher center to be effective, it must design its programs in terms of this reality and seek ways to localize the center's efforts into individual schools and classrooms.

The final reality is one of numbers. For the teacher center to be effective, its programs must be capable of delivering services and opportunities to large numbers of teachers. Most school districts have hundreds, or thousands, of teachers. Real changes in education will only come about if programatic and organizational designs can be created which will serve individual teachers, but will do so on mass scale. While it is true that there are many interested, committed teachers actively seeking means for self-improvement, it is also true that these are only a small percentage of the total. A teacher center design which leaves all initiative to the willingness of the individual teacher to travel even short distances,

and to give up personal time for purposes of professional enhancement will reach only a small percentage of the teachers serving American children. This means that although we must provide teachers with the option to participate in the "free" teacher centers which are now emerging in some urban areas, we must also provide systematic opportunities for professional development which are brought to the local school and to the individual teacher in his own classroom.

These and other realities suggest that an effective and viable teacher center capable of raising the quality of education on a district-wide basis must be designed in terms of the principles listed below:

A. PRINCIPLES OF ORGANIZATIONAL-ADMINISTRATIVE DESIGN

(1) Cost Effectiveness

The impact of the activities of a teacher center must be measurable in terms of per unit cost. The center's programs must be designed to focus on development of observable and measurable changes in teacher competency so as to provide a basis for judging the effectiveness of per dollar expenditure for results achieved. Cost effectiveness also requires minimizing the expenditure for administrative superstructure, space and equipment. Where money is spent on supplies and equipment, it must be earmarked for programs capable of yielding a high return measured in terms of changes in teaching behavior and pupil learning. The demands of cost effectiveness obviate many traditional means of in-service training, e.g. guest speakers, discussion workshops, travel, etc. New mechanisms must be found which focus specifically and directly upon the development of measurable competencies.

(2) Optimal Use of Existing Facilities and Materials

To be cost effective teacher center programs must make optimal use of existing facilities. This means extended-day use of space, buildings, equipment, etc. Cost effectiveness also requires making optimal use of existing materials whether these materials be commercially produced items which have been purchased from district funds, or whether they may be teacher produced materials which are capable of raising the level of professional competence throughout the district should they be made available for general use. Making teacher made materials available for general use may well release money otherwise needed for commercial purchase.

(3) Optimal Use of Existing Talent

One of the largest budget items in any school district is the salary budget. Cost effectiveness requires that people already on salary should be used effectively wherever possible so as to reduce the need to hire outside consultants. This principle suggests that teachers should be used to train one another to implement better practices which they have created. It also suggests that teachers can be trained in new procedures and practices and will help to disseminate these amongst themselves. The principle of using existing talent has foundation in principles of human behavior and organizational development as well as in the necessity for cost effectiveness. It is well known that teacher listen to each other more readily than they listen to outsiders who "do not understand the local situation or the teacher's own problems." It is also well known that teachers have few means for professional recognition. By using teachers to train each other, a teacher center can not only disseminate good practices and stimulate discussion of common problems it can provide a mechanism for recognition of professional achievement and contribution.

(4) Minimal Organizational Intervention

The success and longevity of a teacher center, indeed of any new program, is very much a question of the extent to which it requires creation of new staff positions and intervenes in existing channels of communication, authority and decision-making. At least in its initial phases, the teacher center should be designed in such a way as to utilize existing channels of communication and existing roles. The center should facilitate organizational development as a result of successful programs, not require organizational change as a condition of existence. Proper attention to this principle will result in planning which builds a teacher center from "the grass-roots" teacher activities in their own classrooms and cooperative efforts. Organizational development would, in large measure, be a response to demonstrated need.

(5) Facilitate Communication Among Existing Staff and Across Existing Programs

The teacher center must organizationally, as well as programmatically, be structured so as to contribute to the enhancement of communication and the synthesizing of existing efforts.

(6) Teacher Control

Administration, program design and budget management should be placed in the hands of the teachers themselves to the greatest possible extent. Teachers must be helped to accept the responsibility for their own professional development and to accept the consequences of their own decisions. Administration of a teacher center can be handled by an executive committee of teachers who are made responsible to an assistant superintendant, just as effectively as by a director

who is paid a high salary. Placing management responsibilities upon the teachers has symbolic value for self-definition of teachers as well as political value in the education community. It seems likely that the budget requirements for an effective teacher center would be lower if teachers are made responsible for investing their own efforts into the center. The teacher center which is dependent upon teachers who are always paid to participate is costly and possibly incapable of producing substantial results.

(7) Programmatic Activities of the Teacher Center should be Physically Located in the Individual Classrooms and at the Local Schools to the Greatest Possible Extent

The reasons for so placing activities have to do with the characteristics of teachers, problems of organizational intervention, and psychodynamics of behavior change. This principle suggests that a) workshops must be mobile, b) materials must be transportable, c) program activities must be clinical (in the sense of focusing on real behavior in individual classrooms) and d) organization of the teacher center as a social structure must include participant roles, leadership roles within the individual school, and leadership roles among schools. The principle suggests ultimate creation of a representational system of decision making and management.

(8) Use of Teachers to Train Teachers to the Greatest Possible Extent

(7) Provision of Status, Monetary or Other Rewards

In the past, teachers have been told that they must contribute extra services, spend time on self development and participate in a variety of meetings because such activities are part of "being professional." Currently teachers are affiliating with organizations for the purpose of negotiating salary compensation

or in non-classroom activities. It is clear that a teacher center can only be effective if its programs and activities are tied into a reward system in the school district which it serves. Teachers who assume instructional or administrative responsibilities will require compensation and/or status recognition and/or released time. Teachers who participate in center programs as learners will require salary credit or other forms of reward. It is unrealistic to assume that a teacher center can substantially effect the behaviors of classroom teachers unless the center is associated with an effective reward system.

(10) Centralized Resource Repositories

Workshop activities must be readily accessible both in terms of time and geography.

(11) The School District Must Utilize Existing or Create New Assessment Capabilities for Determination of Cost Effectiveness

This means that the teacher center programs and activities must be designed in terms of cost effectiveness, supported by a proper accounting system and accessible to audit and evaluation.

(12) School Level Organizations

Teachers who participate in center activities should be organized into working groups at the school building level. Otherwise there will be little mutual support for individual efforts to improve. Teachers who are discovering new ideas, and experimenting with new procedures require personal and professional support from interested colleagues. Where such support is lacking,

the impetus for the teacher to change frequently dissipates. Organizationally, this means that the center's activities and programs must always be designed to focus upon groups of teachers at building level. The center should not only encourage one teacher from a school to participate.

(13 Quality Control

The teacher center must structually organize so as to provide for a review of programs and activities by the teachers whom the center serves. An effective center must be responsive to the needs of the teachers but must be responsive to the teachers in a qualitative way. This principle suggests creation of a review panel of teacher-leaders who are responsible for the regular review and evaluation of center programs and activities. Where teachers are also responsbile for administration and budget control and/or operation of the teacher center activities, the review panel is an effective means for determining budgetary priorities. It also insures continuous feedback on the quality and efforts both of active organizers and of active participants.

(14 Timing

Teacher center activities must be regular on-going, and routinized into the affairs of local schools and of the district. The teacher center will only be an effective means for facilitating improvement of teaching and advancement of educational progress if the activities and programs of the center are a regular part of teaching life.

B. PRINCIPLES OF PROGRAM DESIGN

(1) Competency Based

The teacher center program must focus upon development of operationally defined teacher competencies (behaviors). Otherwise, the center's program can not be measured in terms of cost effectiveness.

(2) Relevance

Since the purpose of creating a teacher center is the support and enhancement of teacher efforts to more effectively facilitate pupil learning, the primary relevance of center programs must be judged in terms of theoretical and empirical principles of learning. Where the center's programs focus upon experimentation or development of new methods and procedures, these efforts must be designed to contribute to understandings of learning processes and must do so in such a way as to make it possible to disseminate these understandings widely to all teachers serviced by the center. All other criteria for judging the relevance of teacher center programs should be secondary. Where the materials or understandings are not capable of wide dissemination and are not clearly tied to valid principles of learning, such efforts should be carefully reviewed by a quality control panel.

(3) Self-Assessment

Whatever their nature and whatever their purpose, teacher center programs must provide systematic and objective means for continuing self-assessment by participating teachers. Unless the teachers have a means to analyze and measure the results of their own efforts to improve, they can not gain the degree of self-control which characterizes a professional, nor can they gain the degree of self-control that makes it possible for the teacher to achieve psychological as well as organizational security. By designing center programs so

that they make possible systematic self-assessment, one is able to provide teacher participants with the mechanisms for making their own individual classrooms into clinics for self-improvement.

(4) The Classroom Clinic

By localizing the teacher center activities into the school and into the classroom, and by providing teachers with a systematic means for continuing self-assessment, the center makes it possible for teacher participants to view their own classrooms as clinics for use in experimentation by each teacher within his own classroom. A teacher who approaches his classroom with this orientation has a means for monitoring his own behavior, has opportunities and mechanisms for experimentation (and for analysis of results of experimentation), and has a built-in means for reinforcing and supporting his needs for relevance and motivation. The two principles of self-assessment and the classroom clinic encourage design of a self-development program capable of activating those psychodynamic processes which lead to lasting changes in teaching behavior.

(5) Implementation and Assessment of New Practices

An effective teacher center will focus its efforts on implementation and assessment of new curricula, new teaching procedures and new materials, by individual teachers and groups of collaborating teachers. Such new approaches may be designed through teacher center activity or may have been imported from without the district.

(6) Program Development and Experimentation

A primary focus of teacher center programs must be upon the development of new teaching procedures, new materials and new curricula through the individual efforts and participation of cooperative planning.

(7) Communication Across Subject and Grade Levels

Teacher center prog ams must be designed so as to facilitate communication of joint planning across subject and grade levels thereby leading to increased articulation of teaching procedures and curricula. Efforts to articulate procedures and curricula will benefit the children and will also contribute to the professionalization and further training of the teachers themselves.

(8) Training

Activities and programs must provide continuous training in the concepts and methodologies of social science, physical science and humanities, so as to make it possible for continuous upgrading of teacher knowledge. HOWEVER, such training must be geared to the improvement of curricula and be consistent with the principles of teachers-teaching-teachers. When, for example, teachers from a district attend a National Science Foundation workshop, the teacher center should make it possible for the dissemination of the learnings from that workshop throughout the district.

(9) Articulation of Classroom and Home Teaching

Teacher center programs must be designed so as to facilitate articulation and complementarity of the content and procedures of teaching in school with those children learning at home or in the community. A

serious attention to this design principle will result in the creation of a program for parent use and which can function either independently or in close cooperation with the center development programs for teachers. This design principle is important because it encourages efforts to make the learning environment for the individual child continuous between home and school. Such continuity is not dependent upon special curriculum and teaching materials designed for home use, but rather it is dependent upon the continuity of emotional and of inter-personal environment created as a result of teacher and parent actions towards the child. It is also dependent upon teachers and parents utilizing their natural surroundings as a rich basis for facilitating language and conceptual learning in their children.

(10) Community Resources

Program planning and development activities of the teacher center must exploit and make creative use of all resources available within the community, always focusing upon improvement of instruction and learning.

(11) Resource Center

An effective teacher center will create and make regular use of a resource center which includes both commercial and teacher-made materials. Primary emphasis should be upon identification of promising practices of the teachers in the area and upon creation of workshop packages which are capable of disseminating those practices across the district. Such a focus places a premium on teacher development and experimentation with new procedures and practices and also serves to enhance the professional achievements of local teachers. A resource center should also maintain an on-going data record

(audio-tapes, video tapes, written observations, etc.) of both good and bad programs, procedures and practices. Such records can be used by teachers themselves as a basis for future planning and for review of past efforts. As teachers become more professional they will have a greater need for local made data records which will allow them to make sound and informed judgments based upon past experience.

(12) Growth Patterns

To be effective as a means of enhancing purpose and professional identity, the teacher center must, from the outset, create and act upon an image of teacher management, teacher decision making and participation. This means that the center must initially be designed as a "grass roots" operation. In such a design, initial participants become leaders and instructors for those to follow. Growth is a matter of the actions of teachers upon other teachers. A wise administrator would begin on a small scale with a program deliberately designed to create lead teachers capable of training colleagues at the local school level. Administrative superstructure, elaborate space needs and all of the panoply of organizational elaboration must be a natural development flowing from the successful activities of the lead teachers working in the district.

OVER-ARCHING DESIGN PRINCIPLE

While all of the foregoing design principles are important as foundations for creating a teacher center, they must be subsumed under, and interpreted in terms of, a general principle of *professional responsibility*. Whatever a teacher center does, however it is organized, and whatever its program content, the teacher center must give primary, intensive and continuing attention to helping teachers become fundamentally responsible for their

own development. Professionalization of teaching will only occur as a consequence of teachers in large numbers accepting the responsibility for continuing self-assessment, for continuing self-development and for continuing experimentation. The primary purpose of the teacher center should be to make this possible.